

Old Testament Introduction

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Reading the Old Testament

The *Come, Follow Me* manual has good suggestions for enhancing your reading of the Old Testament this year. It reminds us that the Old Testament is just that—old—and that the culture behind the writings is very different from ours. I offer some thoughts in this introduction beyond what CFM does, in the hope that it will help you read the Old Testament with a fresh perspective and new insights, with the goal of finding eternal truths that enhance your life and your relationship with God and his son, Jesus Christ.

Old Testament Organization

The collections of books called the “Old Testament” by Latter-day Saints and other Christian churches is not a single collection of identical texts throughout the world or over time. Compiled over thousands of years, the books were first written on scrolls and thus handled individually. It was not until the Christian era that people began to put them in codices or books, ultimately resulting in a single book called “The Bible,” though different groups selected different scrolls and gave them ‘scripture’ status, resulting in different Bibles around the world, such as the sample below:

Jewish	Protestant / LDS	Catholic	Eastern Orthodox	Alexandrinus (5 th cent Greek mss)
<i>Torah (Instruction)</i>	<i>Law or Pentateuch</i>			
Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
<i>Nevi'im (Prophets)</i>	<i>History</i>			
Joshua	Joshua	Joshua		Joshua
Judges	Judges	Judges		Judges + Ruth
	Ruth	Ruth		
Samuel	1 Samuel	1 Samuel		Samuel
	2 Samuel	2 Samuel		
Kings	1 Kings	1 Kings		Kings
	2 Kings	2 Kings		
	1 Chronicles	1 Chronicles		Chronicles
	2 Chronicles	2 Chronicles		
			1 Esdras	1 Esdras
	Ezra	Ezra	2 Esdras	Ezra + Nehemiah
	Nehemiah	Nehemiah		
		Tobit		Tobit
		Judith		Judith
	Esther	Esther	Esther	Esther
		1 Maccabees	1 Maccabees	1 – 4 Maccabees
		2 Maccabees	2 Maccabees	
			3 Maccabees	
			4 Maccabees	
	<i>Wisdom</i>			
	Job	Job	Job	Job

Jewish	Protestant / LDS	Catholic	Eastern Orthodox	Alexandrinus (5 th cent Greek mss)
	Psalms	Psalms	Psalms	Psalms
			Odes	
	Proverbs	Proverbs	Proverbs	Proverbs
	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes
	Song of Songs	Song of Songs	Song of Songs	Song of Songs + Wisdom
		Wisdom	Wisdom	
		Sirach	Sirach	
				Ecclesiasticus
	Prophets			
Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah
Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Jeremiah + Baruch
		Baruch	Baruch	
	Lamentations			Lamentations + Letter of Jeremiah
			Letter of Jeremiah	
Ezekiel	Ezekiel	Ezekiel	Ezekiel	Ezekiel
	Daniel	Daniel	Daniel	Daniel + Susanna + Bel & the Dragon
Hosea	Hosea	Hosea	Hosea	Hosea
Joel	Joel	Joel	Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos	Amos	Amos	Amos
Obadiah	Obadiah	Obadiah	Obadiah	Obadiah
Jonah	Jonah	Jonah	Jonah	Jonah
Micah	Micah	Micah	Micah	Micah
Nahum	Nahum	Nahum	Nahum	Nahum
Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Habakkuk
Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Zephaniah
Haggai	Haggai	Haggai	Haggai	Haggai
Zechariah	Zechariah	Zechariah	Zechariah	Zechariah
Malachi	Malachi	Malachi	Malachi	Malachi
<i>Kethuvim (Writings)</i>				
Psalms				
Proverbs				
Job				
Song of Songs				
Ruth				
Lamentations				
Ecclesiastes				
Esther				
Daniel				
Ezra/Nehemiah				
Chronicles				

In the Hebrew version used by Jews, the Bible is divided into three sections called *Torah* (Instruction), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Kethuvim* (Writings). In their scriptures, the *Kethuvim* come last and include books that Christians generally consider Prophets or History, with the *Nevi'im* including what Christians consider historical books. Taking the first letter of each section, Jews often refer to the Bible as *Tanak* (or *Tanakh*). The Western Christian Bible typically groups the books into four sections—Pentateuch (the Greek name for the Torah, meaning ‘five scrolls,’ a term still commonly used today), History, Wisdom, and Prophets. In both works, there are the major

prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel) and the minor prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, etc., often called the Twelve because of their number and grouping).

Supporting Your Study of the Old Testament

There are many tools to help us better understand the books of the Old Testament, including other translations, study Bibles, and commentaries.

Translations and Study Bibles

One of the best things to do is to read other translations than the King James Bible. While beautifully written, the language of the KJV is archaic English and not the way we speak today. Other translations provide insight just on the more modern word choices. In addition, many translations provide brief commentary (often called “Study Bibles”) that give insight into the culture, practices, or history that help the stories make more sense. Here is a list of some other translations and study Bibles to consider. Note that I include links to the books on Amazon, which is just for convenience; you should buy books from whatever store you would like, check them out from a local library, or whatever works for you. The Kindle versions are often much less than the printed ones. Another good seller to check is Christianbook.com. Note also that many translations can be used for free on websites such as [Bible Study Tools](http://BibleStudyTools.com) and [Bible Hub](http://BibleHub.com). There are also many apps for phones and tablets that have other translations for free (search by translation).

- New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) – This translation is cross-denominational and widely used at universities. Though you can find several publications of this translation, my recommendation is [*The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*](#).
- New International Version (NIV) – This very popular Evangelical translation is known for being easy to read but also capturing the sense of the original languages. There are many publications of this translation; my favorite is the [*NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*](#). Another one to consider is the [*NIV Study Bible*](#) from Zondervan.
- Parallel Bibles – Bibles that have two or more translations side-by-side can be a good way to study. There are many publications so you can pick the versions you want, but I recommend getting a KJV as part of it, since that is the LDS translation in common use. A [*popular one*](#) combines the KJV, NIV, NASB, and Amplified Bibles.
- New American Standard Bible (NASB) – A translation known for precision to the Hebrew and Greek. The best-selling study version of this is the [*MacArthur Study Bible*](#).
- *The Jewish Study Bible: Tanakh Translation* – This book from the [*Jewish Publication Society*](#) is an excellent translation from the Hebrew with insightful commentary from Jewish scholars. The link is to the second edition.
- [*The Hebrew Bible*](#) by Robert Alter. This translation by a renowned Jewish scholar is fascinating to read with insightful notes and commentary. It comes in three beautiful volumes. Not for the faint of heart but you’ll be greatly rewarded for the effort.

Commentaries

A good study Bible (above) can provide helpful but brief commentary. For deeper insights, a good commentary can make a huge difference. Here are some I’ve found helpful.

LDS Commentaries – Old Testament commentaries are fewer than other books of scripture, but here are some that provide good LDS insight.

- *Verse by Verse, The Old Testament*. A two-volume commentary by two excellent Bible scholars, Kelly Ogden and Andrew Skinner. Though called “Verse by Verse,” in order to fit it into just two volumes, they cluster verses together and comment on them.
- *A Latter-day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament*. A classic in LDS scholarship by Ellis T. Rasmussen, a talented Biblical scholar who was the dean of Religious Education and the leader of the creation of the LDS edition of the Bible in 1979.
- *Jehovah and the World of the Old Testament*. Richard Holzapfel, Dana Pike, and David Seely teamed up for this volume that provides cultural and historical information.
- *The Old Testament Made Harder*. James Faulconer wrote a series with this title for each book of scripture that consist mostly of questions to ponder.
- *The Pearl of Great Price: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary* – Because much of the Pearl of Great Price is studied this year, this book by Richard Draper, Kent Brown, and Michael Rhodes is very helpful.
- *The Book of Moses: From the Ancient of Days to the Latter Days*. A detailed study of this book by Aaron Shade and Matthew Bowen.
- Various Sperry Symposium volumes. Over the years, BYU has hosted symposiums on the Old Testament many times. Relevant ones include *Covenant of Compassion* (2021) and *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord* (2013). These volumes are collections of essays by scholars and are helpful in understanding books and passages in the Old Testament.

Non-LDS Commentaries – The scholarship on the Old Testament is broad and deep outside the Church. We can gain great insights from the work of many who have dedicated their lives to understanding these books. Many of the best commentaries focus on a single Old Testament book (or even part of a book). These are too many to list but the committed student is invited to search these out and enjoy a deep study. See the Select Bibliography below for some suggestions. Specific volumes I have enjoyed will be added with each book of scripture studied.

Videos and Podcasts

These days, many watch or listen to content created by various people, including BYU professors and others with strong scriptural backgrounds. Here are some to consider.

- [Book of Mormon Central](#): several videos and podcasts available from various authors and scholars. This is probably the most comprehensive of any *Come, Follow Me* effort.
- [FollowHim podcast](#), Hank Smith and John Bytheway
- [Unshaken](#) by Jared Halverson
- The Interpreter Foundation [resources](#)
- FAIR [resources](#)

Select Bibliography

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